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**Experiential sponsorship activation at a sports mega-event:
The case of Cisco at London 2012**

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Experiential sponsorship activation at a sports mega-event: The case of Cisco at London 2012

Abstract

Purpose: The application of event design principles in the creation and execution of effective experiential sponsorship activations (ESAs) by B2B brands is explored. Challenges posed by the sponsorship context to sponsors seeking to create ESAs are examined, with potential solutions proposed.

Methodology: A case study of Cisco’s ESA activities as part of its London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games sponsorship activation is developed, drawing on interviews with key Cisco employees and secondary sources of data, both internal and external to Cisco.

Findings: Blending the event design principles typically associated with B2B events with those more commonly found in corporate hospitality or B2C events, enables sponsors to address the cognitive needs of attendees as business representatives while also satisfying their needs as individuals seeking more sensorial experiences. Effective use of event design principles, creative marketing and promotion, and collaboration with other sponsors allows brands to overcome constraints placed on them by the unpredictable nature of sponsorship, sponsorship rights agreements and the increased clutter in the sponsorship environment.

Research implications: Existing knowledge on sponsorship activation is extended, drawing on principles of event design to offer a sponsor-focused perspective on the creation and execution of effective ESAs for B2B brands. Existing thinking around B2B event design is challenged and augmented when considering its application to ESA design.

Practical implications: Inter-sponsor collaboration and the blending of cognitive and sensorial elements of event design are important for sponsors seeking to create and deliver effective ESAs.

Originality: The paper draws on event design literature to appraise the execution of ESA by B2B brands within the context of event sponsorship.

Keywords: sponsorship; activation; experiential marketing; event design; experience design; business-to-business

Article classification: Research paper

1.0 Introduction

The sponsorship of sporting events represents an established form of marketing promotion, with global sponsorship expenditure totalling \$55.3 billion in 2014 (IEG, 2015). However, sponsorship practices are changing, with a shift from a short-term, sales-oriented approach, towards a more strategic and longer-term relational outlook (Farrelly *et al.*, 2006). Parallel to these changes is a significant growth in experiential marketing practice (Smilansky, 2009), and consequently event marketing emerges as a useful strategy through which to enhance the effectiveness of sponsorship (Fransen *et al.*, 2013; Whelan and Wohlfeil, 2006; Wood, 2009).

Against this backdrop, it is becoming routine for a whole series of spin-off events to be activated by sponsors around a sporting occasion. Yet, within the sponsorship, event and experiential marketing literature, there remains inconsistency in the terminology used to describe these spin-off events, with, for example, Zarantonello and Schmitt (2013, p. 257) suggesting that 'event marketing includes but is not limited to event sponsorship'. Certainly event marketing encompasses a much broader range of activity than that involving sponsorship, however the argument couched in this paper, and others, is that these spin-off

events, used to activate the sponsorship, are firmly positioned as examples of event marketing within the domain of sponsorship activation. While the sponsored event is customarily referred to as the ‘property’, Whelan and Wohlfeil (2006) make the argument that these spin-off events are distinct from actual sponsorship of the event in that they may be removed from the live sporting occasion temporally and/or spatially and they are designed, managed and controlled by the sponsoring brand. In this paper we refer to such events as ‘experiential sponsorship activation’ (ESA). ESA thus represents the application of event marketing as an experiential marketing communications strategy (Björner and Berg, 2012; Wohlfeil and Whelan, 2006) used as part of the activation of a sponsorship.

ESA in relation to sporting events is a term encompassing varied activities, such as VIP parties, bespoke customer areas, visitor attractions, sponsorship-linked roadshows (Papadimitriou and Apostolopoulou, 2009) and on-site activations. For example, Samsung Galaxy Studios in the Rio 2016 Olympic Park allowed visitors to interact with the company’s products and technologies, including the opportunity to ‘experience’ Olympic sports such as kayaking, using Samsung virtual reality products and 4D technology (IEG, 2016). ESA was also enacted by many London 2012 Olympic Games sponsors, typically within purposely constructed spaces around Olympic venues. Examples included Cisco House (Cisco, 2012a) and Cadbury House (Degun, 2012). The growth of Web-enabled marketing also widens the scope of ESA into digital space (Pine and Gilmore, 2016; Gilmore and Pine, 2002). Thus, London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games sponsor Cadbury hosted a series of successful Google+ hangouts with British Olympic athletes (Google, 2012). Another example of online/social-media hosted ESA was Panasonic’s Dream ‘FITA’ Project, which invited fans to share their dreams, create a ‘FITA’ charm (a fita is a type of ribbon worn around the wrist), and possibly receive a message from Brazilian footballer Neymar Jr as a result of uploading their dreams to the dedicated website (Panasonic, 2016).

The concept of sponsorship activation as a broad collection of promotional activities is receiving increasing attention from scholars. However, this has principally focussed on established activation tools such as sponsorship-linked advertising (Fortunato, 2015, 2013; Degaris and West, 2012), sales promotions (Dodds et al., 2014), public relations (Degaris and West, 2012) and online promotions (Cahill and Meenaghan, 2013, Weeks *et al.*, 2008). Where event marketing in a sponsorship context has been explored, this has been wholly concerned with B2C sponsor brands, largely with a focus on consumer response to these activations (Close and Lacey, 2014; Fransen *et al.*, 2013, Papadimitriou and Apostolopoulou, 2009; Sneath *et al.*, 2005). However, B2B brands are increasingly involved in sponsorship, with 22 out of the 53 sponsors of the London 2012 Olympic Games having a B2B orientation (Guardian, 2012). To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study to focus on event marketing and design literature in examining ESA by a B2B brand. Therefore, our paper addresses a gap in the literature by assessing the elements of event design necessary for the successful execution of ESA by B2B brands, as well as examining the challenges posed by the nature of contemporary sponsorship environments and the restrictions in sponsorship agreements for sponsors seeking to implement ESAs. Our paper's principal contribution is, therefore, to refine existing understanding of the application of event design principles in experiential sports sponsorship activation activity, particularly for B2B brands.

Our paper is an exploratory study, which first sets the theoretical context by examining literature on sponsorship activation and event marketing and design. From this review of literature, two research questions are advanced, which are subsequently addressed using data from a case study of Cisco's sponsorship of the London 2012 Olympic Games. Within the conclusion, the implications of the paper's findings for sponsorship and event marketing theory and practice are considered.

2.0 Theoretical context

2.1 Changing approaches to sponsorship

The motivations underpinning corporate sponsorship of sport have evolved from philanthropy to develop a keener preoccupation with return on investment (RoI) (Lough *et al.*, 2000). Indeed, as sponsorship matures, its objectives have begun to move beyond mere awareness and image benefits to incorporate relational outcomes. Thus, sponsorship is increasingly seen by organisations as a means of interacting with their multiple stakeholders and getting to know them better (Farrelly *et al.*, 2006; Kumar, 1997). Changing sponsorship objectives, and the concomitant emergence of ESA, are understandable given the suggested structural shift in marketing from a transactional to a relational emphasis (Grönroos, 1990), and towards doing things ‘with’ customers (Vargo and Lusch, 2004). Such interpretations of contemporary marketing practice are echoed in recent sponsorship literature discussing objectives linked to loyalty and affinity (Cahill and Meenaghan, 2013; Mazodier and Merunka, 2012) and relationship building (Henseler *et al.*, 2011; Singh and Bhatia, 2015).

Crucial in maximising the possibility of positive sponsorship RoI is activation, defined by Weeks *et al.* (2008, p.639) as ‘communications that promote the engagement, involvement, or participation of the sponsorship audience with the sponsor’. Notably, there is a participative emphasis in the narrative surrounding ‘activation’ that is not present in other terms such as sponsorship ‘articulation’ (Coppetti *et al.*, 2009) or ‘leverage.’ Sponsorship activation, traditionally involving linked-advertising and promotional tools such as sweepstakes, competitions, product sampling and themed brand websites, has evolved considerably over recent years. This has been due, in part, to advances in new technologies, including social media (Dees, 2011; Delia and Armstrong, 2015), and wider structural shifts towards an integrated and cross-platform approach to sponsorship strategy (Cahill and Meenaghan, 2013; Penna and Guenzi, 2014). Alongside the growing importance of new

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3 technology, sponsorship activation has been influenced by wider shifts in marketing towards
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5 an experience orientation, heralded by authors such as Pine and Gilmore (1998) and Schmitt
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7 (1999), who recognise the potency of customer and consumer experiences in generating
8
9 emotional connections that can deliver a competitive edge for organisations in crowded
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11 marketplaces. Such a focus on customer and brand experience is central to notions of event
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13 marketing (Björner and Berg, 2012), defined by Whelan and Wohlfeil (2006, p. 314) as:

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16 ‘the interactive communication of brand values by staging marketing events as three
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18 dimensional brand-related hyperrealities in which consumers are actively involved on
19
20 a behavioural level and which would result in their emotional attachment to the
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22 brand.’
23

24
25 Sponsors are increasingly seeking these types of ‘experiential branding’ opportunities
26
27 to better engage the target stakeholders of sponsorship activity (Performance Research,
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29 2014), and are therefore employing event marketing, such as event-based sponsor exhibits, as
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31 part of their sponsorship activation activities (Close and Lacey, 2014; Fransen *et al.*, 2013,
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33 Papadimitriou and Apostolopoulou, 2009; Sneath *et al.*, 2005). The creation by corporate
34
35 sponsors of what Gilmore and Pine (2002) refer to as customer experience places - that is
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37 spaces where they can physically, or virtually, coalesce with customers, suppliers and other
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39 key stakeholders, and where there is ‘purposeful’ design of the experiential setting - thus
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41 provides considerable opportunity to facilitate the achievement of relational aims (Crowther,
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43 2010).
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46
47 In order to express the growing prominence of event marketing within sponsorship we
48
49 employ the term ‘experiential sponsorship activation’. Consistent with Wood’s (2009, p. 248)
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51 definition of an event as a ‘live “occurrence” with an audience’, ESA denotes *sponsorship-*
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53 *linked* spin-off events (both physical and virtual), which offer *immersive* brand experiences
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55 and encourage high levels of *active participation*. Crucial in this definition is that there is a
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connection to the sponsored property through an ESA event's theme, location and content, thus distinguishing it from a brand's other event marketing activities. Equally important to note is the high degree of active audience participation, beyond that involved in other activations such as watching a TV commercial, browsing a website or entering a sponsorship-linked contest, thus framing ESA as a subset of wider sponsorship activation. Such a definition acknowledges that in an age where value is increasingly co-created between brands and customers (Vargo and Lusch, 2004), brands are creating immersive experiences (Gilmore and Pine, 2002) under the umbrella of their sponsorships, which facilitate a close degree of connection between attendees at an ESA and the brand. Such activations, if well-conceived and executed, can add value for the sponsoring company, in terms of cementing existing customer relationships and generating new leads (Cahill and Meenaghan, 2013; Davies and Tsiantas, 2008; Stokes, 2005). However, ESAs may also help in the delivery of experiential 'value' (Papadimitriou and Apostolopoulou, 2009) for consumers of the sponsored event, making them more predisposed to doing future business with the sponsoring company. While previous studies of experiential activation of sponsorship have concerned themselves with assessing consumer responses to these activations, none have thus far taken a sponsor perspective and focused on the design principles required to effectively create and deliver these events.

2.2 Event design and marketing

The growth of ESA reflects the emergence of events as a noteworthy promotional approach. As investment in marketing events grows, their design sophistication becomes a competitive battleground (McCole, 2004). In this context, designing ESA to achieve the sponsor's objectives demands an enlightened and creative approach that recognises what will entice and engage prospective attendees (Alcántara *et al.*, 2014; Nelson, 2009). Events can be

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3 characterised by a range of features, such as the voluntary and active participation of
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5 attendees (Wohlfeil and Whelan, 2006), the potential to facilitate a sense of community
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7 through shared experiences (Björner and Berg, 2012), and the capacity to provide and
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9 provoke opportunities for on-going and consistent conversations with consumers and other
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11 stakeholders (Crowther and Donlan, 2011). In short, the creation and facilitation of these
12
13 kinds of interactions between corporate sponsoring entities and their stakeholders can be a
14
15 source of competitive advantage to the sponsor brands (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004).
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18
19 As the appropriation of marketing events and, more broadly, experiential marketing
20
21 approaches flourishes, there has been an increasing focus among academics on experience
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23 design (Gentile *et al.*, 2007; Kale *et al.*, 2010; Pullman and Gross, 2004; Wohlfeil and
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25 Whelan, 2007), drawing on perspectives as diverse as theatre studies (Nelson, 2009) and
26
27 service design (Zomerdijk and Voss, 2010). Much early thinking in this area was influenced
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29 by Pine and Gilmore (1998), who identify four realms of experience: entertainment,
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31 education, escapist and aesthetic, with the richest experiences derived from a combination of
32
33 these. Implicit in this thinking is the notion that, as business clients are increasingly selective
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35 about the sponsored events they attend (Archer, 2011), it is no longer sufficient for sponsors
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37 to merely entertain clients (Pine and Gilmore, 1999); there is a need to creatively engage
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39 them through absorbing, immersive, but also personally relevant, experiences (Poulsson and
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41 Kale, 2004; Wood, 2009).
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44
45 Pine and Gilmore (1998) go on to suggest five experience design principles: theming
46
47 the experience, harmonising impressions with positive cues, eliminating negative cues,
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49 mixing in memorabilia, and engaging all five senses. Similarly, Schmitt (1999) refers to
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51 addressing different dimensions of customer experience, such as sensorial, affective,
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53 cognitive, physical, behavioural and social identity, while other authors identify a range of
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55 attributes which are posited to enhance a given event experience, including: innovation,
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integrity (Wood and Masterman, 2007), novelty (Tafesse, 2016), personal relevance, surprise, exclusivity (Poulsson and Kale, 2004), intellectual stimulation, and opportunities to interact with others (Zarantonello and Schmitt, 2013). What emerges is a more sophisticated and subtle perspective, which elevates the opportunities in designing and executing ESAs.

The ‘designing in’ of these more experiential event dimensions recognises the centrality of the needs of the event attendee or participant (Crowther and Donlan, 2011; Kale *et al.*, 2010; Wohlfeil and Whelan, 2007). If ESAs are to be successful, there is a need to provide a compelling reason to attend. Thus it is incumbent upon the sponsoring brand to curate an event environment in which affirmative and memorable consumer experiences can be promised and, hopefully, delivered (Schmitt, 1999). In this sense, corporate sponsors are often at an advantage as they regularly have rights of access to desirable properties, allowing them to attract attendees to brand-related events and experiences linked to personal interests (Wohlfeil and Whelan, 2007) and passions (Close and Lacey, 2014), such as sport and entertainment.

Much of the extant literature on event and experiential marketing concerns B2C companies, with many authors stressing that consumers’ needs are not only rational but also emotional (Schmitt, 1999), as they seek stimulation and entertainment as well as pure information from the brands with which they interact. Many studies of consumer experience have taken as their starting point the view of Holbrook and Hirschmann (1982), whereby consumer actions are motivated not just by rationality, but by fantasy, fun and feelings. Conversely, Rinallo *et al.* (2010) argue that this focus on the emotional and hedonic elements of consumption in experiential marketing might explain its limited application thus far in B2B settings, which can often be characterised by relatively rational purchase decision making (Gilliland and Johnston, 1997). Indeed, Rinallo *et al.* (2010) identify that, in the context of trade shows, sensorial stimulation is only a means to the end goal of visitors

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2
3 acquiring knowledge (i.e. a cognitive motivation), suggesting that such events should focus
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5 predominantly on the cognitive and relational elements. The implication here is that event
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7 attendees seeking cognitive stimulation and those seeking the more sensory or autotelic
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9 motivations of fun, fantasy and feelings are unlikely to be satisfied by the same event
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11 (Altschwager *et al.*, 2015). Moreover, sensorial-oriented event features might be ineffective
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13 for B2B event audiences (Rinallo *et al.*, 2010). The present study, therefore, examines the
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15 application of the principles of event design to create effective ESAs, addressing the
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17 following research question:
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21 *RQ1: How can B2B sponsors draw on principles of event design and experiential*
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23 *marketing to execute effective ESAs?*
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25

26 27 2.3 Sports sponsorship and ESA 28

29
30 Within the academic literature, the most frequently discussed examples of experiential
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32 activations concern the creation of sponsor exhibits where sponsoring brands offer visitors,
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34 typically existing or potential consumers, the opportunity to personally interact with their
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36 products (Close and Lacey, 2014; Sneath *et al.*, 2005). A key success factor in such ESAs is
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38 the centrality of the brand to the consumer experience and how the brand is infused in the
39
40 event space (Crowther and Donlan, 2011). Unlike these B2C contexts, the targets of B2B
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42 sponsorship activations are wider, and may range from members of a business's employees to
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44 its shareholders and clients (Meenaghan *et al.*, 2013).
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48 Sponsorship-linked event marketing by B2B brands has historically been dominated
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50 by corporate hospitality (CH), where clients are typically entertained (i.e. wined and dined)
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52 and given access to watch a particular sporting event. Despite the professed advantages of
53
54 relationship building and increased sales arising from CH (Bennett, 2003; Keynote, 2014),
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56 the practice has attracted criticism in recent years. Most significantly, although the basic
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format involves hosting and entertaining B2B clients (or any other stakeholders) at a sponsored sporting event, rivalry amongst corporate hospitality hosts to gain their participants' attention automatically raises the stakes. In the past, the solution to this was for brands to try and 'out-lavish' each other in order to attract the right attendees (Bennett, 2003). Following the 2008 financial crisis, this led to perceived examples of excessive hospitality being stigmatised as a form of corporate irresponsibility (Meenaghan *et al.*, 2013). Other criticisms have included suggestions that CH is a form of bribery, in that it provides benefits that its recipients could not normally afford and which are not always business-related (Chetwynd, 1998). In a UK context, this concern is more pressing following the 2010 Bribery Act (Ministry of Justice, 2012). Hence, as the ethical compass of organisations and society shifts, brands are increasingly, in the opinion of Archer (2011), moving away from 'glitz and glamour' in their hospitality activities and seeking to recalibrate and augment their ESAs towards a format for event-based activations that are more engaging, informative, socially responsible and value for money (Donlan and Crowther, 2014). Against this backdrop, B2B sponsors face the challenge of how to make such events attractive to in-demand top executives, especially those receiving multiple event invitations from a variety of sponsors (Bennett, 2003). In the context of sports mega-events, with their complex, multi-layered sponsorship structures (Panja, 2016), the challenge of how to combat sponsorship clutter is thus relevant not only in the context of B2C sponsors fighting for audience attention (Cornwell and Relyea, 2000), but also in the market for executive-level corporate hosting.

The above suggests that sponsorship-related activity in the B2B domain is moving away from conventional CH practices into a more progressive form of event marketing, drawing on the principles of event and experience design. This is exemplified through event marketing activations carried out by a range of sponsors at the London 2012 and Rio 2016 Olympic Games (for example, Cisco House (Cisco, 2012a), Cadbury House (Degun, 2012)

and Panasonic World of Wonders (VisitRio, 2016)). However, unlike the creation of branded marketing events (Altschwager *et al.*, 2015), where brands have complete control, event rights holders such as the IOC or FIFA, can exert significant influence over the activation rights of sponsors, often implementing strict rules over what sponsors and non-sponsors alike can and cannot do (Rio2016, 2016). For example, depending on the level of the sponsorship, brands may only have activation rights in a particular market (e.g. the six UEFA EURO2016 national partners could activate only in France) (UEFA, 2016), or their rights may only cover a subset of the company's overall product offerings. As an example, despite producing and selling a broad range of consumer electronics products including mobile phones, TVs and kitchen appliances, Samsung has category exclusivity only in wireless communications equipment as part of its Olympic sponsorship. Similarly, Panasonic's rights as part of the same event cover audio/TV and video equipment (see <https://www.olympic.org/sponsors> for full details of current TOP sponsor rights). This illustrates how sponsors can be constrained by their agreements in terms of which of their products they can promote through their sponsorship-linked activities. In addition, the nature of sponsorship means that sponsors are ceding some control of the presentation of their brand to the sponsored event (Meenaghan, 1991; Westberg *et al.*, 2008) and, in the event of scandals or other negative publicity surrounding the sponsored event, are at risk of negative image transfer (Carrillat *et al.*, 2014). In summary, the restrictions imposed by the terms of sponsorship agreements, alongside growing clutter in the B2B sponsorship market and the inherently unpredictable nature of sponsorship itself, present challenges to sponsors in delivering effective ESAs. Thus, the following research question is proposed:

RQ2: How can sponsors overcome the challenges posed by the increased clutter, the terms of sponsorship agreements and the unpredictable nature of sponsorship to deliver effective ESAs?

The next section will outline the methodology adopted for the study, before the focal case is presented and discussed. The paper concludes with implications for theory and practice and the signposting of areas for future research.

3.0 Method

3.1 Research strategy and context

The multi-stakeholder nature of ESA in relation to any sporting event (e.g. event attendees as both individuals and representatives of companies, sponsoring organisations, engaged media representatives) commands a research method allowing exploration of this complexity and its implications for ESA design and execution. Consistent with a realist paradigm (Perry, 1998) and the exploratory nature of the research in this paper, a case study approach was deemed the most appropriate method for examining ESA at a sporting event and as a contemporary marketing phenomenon. The study adopted a single-case design (Yin, 2009), centring on Cisco’s sponsorship of a sports mega-event; namely, the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games (hereinafter ‘London 2012’). Whilst acknowledging criticisms of a single-case design, in terms of its limited powers of generalisability (Eisenhardt, 1989), it does permit a detailed strategic and tactical examination of Cisco’s ESA activity, facilitating an examination of how B2B sponsors can draw upon principles of event design in crafting their ESAs. The use of a single case is also consistent with other sponsorship studies in *Sport, Business and Management: An International Journal* (Kahuni and Rowley, 2013; Crader and Santomier, 2011) and with studies of event marketing and sponsorship activation more widely (Penna and Guenzi, 2014; Whelan and Wohlfeil, 2006; Sneath *et al.*, 2005).

3.2 Data Sources

Woodside and Wilson (2003, p. 493) emphasise that case study research can 'confirm and deepen understanding by using multiple sources all focusing on the same process/event'.

Understanding in this paper was similarly obtained by meticulously examining multiple perspectives from within and outwith the study organisation (Cisco). This involved data from a wide variety of secondary and primary sources. Secondary source material comprised Cisco printed and digital content relating to its London 2012 sponsorship activity, including: web pages, internal strategy documents and best-practice reports (hereafter referred to as Cisco Digital Best Practice Report), Cisco-produced YouTube videos, marketing communications material, the contents of a blog on Cisco House - see below for details of this activation (Collett, 2012), and Cisco's broadcast Twitter activity from January 2011 to September 2012. The latter identified all Twitter feeds relating to the company's London 2012 ESA activity using the hashtag '#plan4success', which Cisco used to promote its ESAs. Similarly, tweets from visitors/attendees to Cisco House were gathered via a search for the hashtag '#ciscohouse', which was widely used on social media by both attendees and employees commenting on this ESA. Secondary data, external to Cisco, were also collected using a Google search to identify all press reports relating to Cisco House. Primary data were gathered through in-depth interviews with the Digital Marketing Program Manager (DMPM) and the Marketing Communications Lead (MCL) at Cisco UK, examining the company's sponsorship of London 2012. The interviews took place immediately prior to the Games. In seeking to judge the success of Cisco's London 2012 ESA activities, it is important to acknowledge that many sources used were produced by the brand itself. However, the interviewees were happy to share both examples of what had and had not worked, while the press reports used offered some degree of independent appraisal of the ESAs' performance. As articulated below in the conclusion, future studies could look to draw on independent research to further examine the effectiveness of ESAs.

3.3 Data analysis

Following the approaches of Abdallah and Langley (2014) and Heracleous (2006), the analysis began from the position of viewing all data as text (e.g. transcripts of online content in the form of reports and blogs about Cisco’s London 2012 sponsorship, Twitter feeds, interview transcripts). These textual data were placed in chronological order to build up an understanding of the emergence of events and occurrences within the case. The researchers then independently looked for central themes within this body of data as text – i.e., a form of confirmability testing. Finally, the researchers’ interpretations of these data were aggregated around the research questions. The paper proceeds to present the case study of Cisco’s ESA activities, evidenced with data from the wide variety of printed/digital secondary data sources and the interviews, either in the form of direct quotes or key statistics, followed by a discussion of the findings.

4.0 Case Elements: Cisco and London 2012

4.1 Case context

Cisco is a multinational corporation providing network solutions to businesses and consumers, although the current focus of the business is largely on the B2B sector. In July 2009, Cisco signed an agreement with LOCOG, the London Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games, to become a tier two Supporter of the Games (London 2012, 2009). Therefore, Cisco was the Official Network Infrastructure Supporter for London 2012, providing network infrastructure to support voice, video and data traffic across 34 competition venues, along with network infrastructure equipment such as routing and switching equipment, network security appliances and IP telephony (Cisco, 2012b). In pursuit of its overall strategic vision and objectives, and embodying the focal idea of ‘not on what

Cisco makes, but on what we make possible' (Collett, 2012), Cisco embraced three experiential activations linked to their sponsorship of London 2012, which were aimed at their B2B stakeholders - the Cisco Interview Series (CIS), Cisco House and the Plan for Success (PFS) webinars. These activations were identified as fitting within the stated definition of ESA, in that they took the form of events, either physical or virtual, bringing together a range of individuals around the uniting theme of London 2012.

Pre-Games, and reflective of the technological nature of the industry in which they operate, Cisco placed an emphasis on virtual events focussed around learning and inspiration. The PFS webinar series fitted this brief as it provided expert insight themed around business issues raised by London 2012, such as transport, HR, media and security. Similarly, the CIS was a virtual event prior to the Games and featured interviews with Olympic athletes which, even if not providing learning to B2B stakeholders, would hopefully be inspiring. Both of these activations were streamed live online and also archived for subsequent viewing. Alongside these virtual events, the mainstay of Cisco's ESA activity was Cisco House. This purpose-built interactive experience was located on the roof of Westfield Shopping Centre in East London overlooking the Olympic Park, and was open from May 2012 until the end of the Paralympic Games in September.

These three B2B-focused ESAs, which form the main focus of this paper, were part of Cisco's overall London 2012 and wider brand marketing strategy. Nevertheless, the company's marketing engagement with (and leverage of) London 2012 also involved media and PR, advertising, social media, and a 'games readiness' online tool for businesses. Cisco also developed a small number of activations that were focused more towards the end-consumers of their products, including: an interactive website where people could compare their lifestyle to that of an Olympian, an online game called KayakAttack, and a visitor installation as part of LOCOG's 'Walk In The Park' programme. While all of the above

examples relate to Cisco's London 2012 sponsorship, it is important to acknowledge that in the run up to the Olympic Games the organisation also enacted other, non-sponsorship-linked promotional campaigns. These, however, are not the focus of this paper. All of Cisco's sponsorship and marketing activities in relation to London 2012 were driven by the vision to 'seize this unique and amazing opportunity to show Cisco as the platform of change in the way we live, learn, work and play' (Cisco Digital Best Practice Report). According to the DMPM, this vision drove the sponsorship objectives, which were to:

1. Position Cisco as most trusted and innovative in technology;
2. Drive customer preference and demand for Cisco architecture and solutions;
3. Drive growth in commercial and small segments through marketing enablement'. (Cisco Digital Best Practice Report)

4.2 The PFS webinars

The target audience for the PFS webinars was 'business leaders and business and technical decision-makers' (Cisco Digital Best Practice Report). As indicated above, the aim of these webinars was to add value for attendees by giving them an opportunity to learn about business issues their companies may face as a result of the Olympic Games, and gain insight into how they could either embrace the opportunities or overcome the challenges these presented. In the words of the MCL:

'I think that the Plan for Success webinars very clearly [matched] the Cisco target audience. [They were] ...structured around something that people didn't know anything about and felt they needed to know something about in order to maintain business as usual, ...during the Games' (MCL interview).

The PFS webinars centred on 'position[ing] Cisco as a business advisor for London 2012, creat[ing] engagement and two-way conversation[s, and] build[ing] relationships with [the]

audience' as well as the more pragmatic 'data capture for lead generation' (Cisco Digital Best Practice Report). Key to the ability of the PFS webinars to embody the ethos of what Cisco 'make possible' (Collett, 2012), was the involvement of other London 2012 partners in webinar delivery, such that Cisco became a facilitator of business information. Thus, the transport webinar involved experts from Transport for London (CiscoUKI, 2012a), while Cisco was joined by representatives from Deloitte and Lloyds TSB for the HR webinar (CiscoUKI, 2012b; CiscoUKI, 2012c), and by the BBC, BT and Adecco for the media webinar (CiscoUKI, 2012d; CiscoUKI, 2012e). The remaining PFS webinar, on security, contained content on network security from Cisco's UK and Ireland Chief Technology Officer and Technical Director, as well as providing information on security at a wider level from experts at Atos, Deloitte and G4S (CiscoUKI, 2012f).

Under the terms of the sponsorship agreement, Cisco's rights did not cover video conferencing; therefore it could not explicitly talk about such products in any activities related to its London 2012 sponsorship. However, in relation to the PFS webinars (and the CIS – see section 4.4 for full details): 'the beauty about virtual events is ...[they] showcase our Cisco products and we use TelePresence in all our virtual events without speaking about the TelePresence, but people can see it' (DMPM interview). The design of the PFS webinars also included live tweeting by Cisco, 'ask a question' functionality on the PFS website, and the dedicated hashtag '#plan4success'. Through this, Cisco delivered a virtual ESA environment that fostered engagement through user sharing of their interactive content, as well as delivering on the objectives of collecting data on potential clients (Cisco Digital Best Practice Report).

4.3 Cisco House

Cisco House, which ‘showcas[ed] ideas and concepts around business transformation for cities, countries, and organisations’ (MCL interview), welcomed 12,000 visitors (CiscoUKI, 2012i) pre- and during the Games. Attendance at Cisco House was by invitation only, with attendees given a designated date and time of arrival. While many targeted invitees were at Chief Officer level, a key strategy to encourage their attendance was to also communicate the benefits and attractiveness of Cisco House to employees at lower levels in target organisations, who were less likely to be invited. This helped develop an air of exclusivity around an invitation to this ESA:

‘So we are doing stuff to target the next level down who won’t necessarily be invited to the House, but we want them to be able to turn around [to their boss] and go, “What, you’ve been invited to Cisco House, clear your diary and get down there ...I’d kill to have an invitation to go.” So that’s part of our strategy’ (MCL interview).

Evidence of this approach working was found in related Twitter commentary. Thus, someone without an invitation to Cisco House noted:

‘@CiscoUKI @CiscoSystems Dedicated Cisco network engineer here, desperately wanting to visit the 2012 #CiscoHouse !Any chance??#CSL2012’ (14zz4, 2012).

The counter-intuitive technique of fostering dialogue about an ESA amongst those *less* likely to be invited to it is distinct from the way business events have traditionally been marketed. In many cases, the same small pool of organisations and potential guests are typically bombarded with constant invitations (Bennett, 2003), which can lead to the sense of a ‘run-of-the-mill’ event. Cisco, however, attempted to elevate the attractiveness of Cisco House in the minds of potential attendees by presenting it as an exclusive and unmissable opportunity; a promise on which this ESA appeared to deliver in its execution, according to average satisfaction scores of 4.7/5 (CiscoUKI, 2012h). This was viewed as impressive, bearing in mind the ‘very much in demand’ nature of the audience for these kinds of

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2
3 activations by Cisco and its competitors (MCL interview). In a further effort to demonstrate
4
5 its commitment to engaging and gaining the trust of key influencers, Cisco responded to
6
7 several of the individuals who had contacted the brand on social media wanting invitations
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9 and arranged for them to visit Cisco House (Cisco DMPM, personal communication).
10
11 Evidencing the apparent success of this integrated communications strategy, one of these
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13 visitors went on to write a blog about his experience at Cisco House (Riccioni, 2012),
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15 resulting in a powerful word-of-mouth peer recommendation for Cisco and its ESA activities
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17 as well as lengthening their impact beyond ESA's temporal and spatial boundaries.
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21 As with the PFS webinars, Twitter activity surrounded the Cisco House ESA, with the
22
23 '#CiscoHouse' hashtag reaching 1,668,514 Twitter accounts during the Olympic and
24
25 Paralympic Games (CiscoUKI, 2012h). Indeed, the interplay between an ESA and social
26
27 media networks appears to be an especially important dimension to this experiential
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29 activation. Even simple devices, such as the creation of the ESA-specific hashtags can
30
31 facilitate word-of-mouth activity and not only extend the reach of ESAs beyond their
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33 immediate attendees, but ideally, enhance wider audience perceptions of their impact. The
34
35 importance of an integrated approach to marketing communications when being used in
36
37 conjunction with ESA is clearly identified by the Cisco MCL:
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41 '...events by their nature tend to be very short-term, and people have very short
42
43 memories. So you can push an awful lot in, and the brand halo effect may not last
44
45 very long compared to perhaps some other activities that you could do. So from an
46
47 integrated approach, if one is doing events, it's how do you stretch those out in some
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49 way, either directly or using other marketing channels to build on the goodwill that
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51 you've created through them' (MCL interview).
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55 Whilst Cisco House did showcase the new technologies of Cisco and its partners such
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57 as Citrix and Intel (Riccioni, 2012; Moore-Evans, 2012), the focus was less about selling
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their products and more on the ways in which these technologies are changing the way people live and work (Marsden, 2012). Upon arrival, guests entered through a dedicated reception area, before being taken on a journey through a series of interactive and 3D presentations, experiences and hands-on exhibits. Visitors began their Cisco House journey by being taken through the 'Business Transformation Experience'. This comprised a mocked-up London Underground carriage where they were immersed in a 3D presentation about businesses that have been transformed by network technology, hosted by British actor and self-confessed technology fan Stephen Fry (Riccioni, 2012; Event Marketer, 2013). Subsequently, visitors listened to a series of presentations from Cisco partners about both current and potential future technologies (e.g. 3D printing) (Riccioni, 2012) and were then invited to engage with other interactive features at their own pace. These included: kinetic technology allowing them to virtually try on clothing from retail stores, touchscreen guides to Olympic venues, and Cisco's TelePresence video conferencing offering (Marsden, 2012; Moore-Evans, 2012; Riccioni, 2012; Event Marketer, 2013). Visitors were therefore enabled to think beyond the 'nuts and bolts' of Cisco technologies and products, with Cisco House acting 'as a critical catalyst for provoking fresh thinking around the needs of organisations today and in the future' (Collett, 2012). Cisco House also featured open areas for networking and refreshments, including a balcony area overlooking the Olympic Park. The aim here was to ensure attendees were actively involved on both physical and cognitive levels with their visit, ideally allowing them to 'take some time out and [be] inspired to think [i.e., the cognitive dimension] about business transformation for their organisation' (MCL Interview). One Cisco House visitor helpfully articulated his response to this:

'The transformation experience that I just went through has really kind of ignited a little bit of a spark in my brain about where we're going to take the future, where my business is going to go' (CiscoUKI, 2012h).

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2
3 A problem with traditional CH is that the link to the sponsor brand is often weak
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5 (Chetwynd, 1998). This was reflected by the MCL, who noted:

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7 '...I think from a hospitality point of view, [attendees] should go away with
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9 something about your business and your brand that is relevant to them and their
10
11 organisation, not merely that they had a good time and they drunk far too much beer'
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13
14 (MCL interview).
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16
17 Conventional CH can exhibit a disconnect between pandering to the entertainment
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19 desires of attendees as individuals and delivering organisational value to the actual B2B
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21 client as a corporate entity. Cisco House, with a focus on showcasing current and future
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23 technologies (Marsden, 2012; Riccioni, 2012), provided 'an opportunity to fully immerse
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25 [the] target audience in the sort of things that [Cisco] wants to get them thinking about'
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27 (MCL interview), but was also 'about letting visitors experience things that are business
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29 relevant' (Incisive Media, 2012). The emphasis thus becomes one of business application,
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31 rather than mere entertainment. Even within their more traditional client hosting programme,
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33 Cisco still strove to control the presentation of the brand within an ESA context, with guests
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35 'immersed in Cisco at Cisco House before they [were] allowed anywhere near an Olympic
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37 ticket' (MCL interview). Several Cisco House attendees praised this business focus, with one
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39 delegate declaring Cisco House 'a cerebral treat' (Collett, 2012). Similarly, one attendee took
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41 to Twitter to praise the 'amazing technology and wonderful presentation' (BethanLucas1st,
42
43 2012), while another declared it the 'best business partnering event I have ever attended,'
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45 going on to say 'I look forward to growing my business with Cisco in the future' (CiscoUKI,
46
47 2012g). In its own review of Cisco House, Cisco reported that 63% of visitors had been
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49 'inspired with new ways of thinking for their own business', with 94% of Cisco House
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51 attendees considering Cisco and its partners 'very relevant for the future of their business
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53 strategy' (CiscoUKI, 2012g).
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The PFS webinars and Cisco House both demonstrate the benefits of bringing in other stakeholder contributions (e.g. customers, suppliers, fellow sponsors, expert commentators) in the design and delivery of ESA content. It helps enhance the value of the ESA experience for attendees, thereby delivering value back to the sponsoring organisation through the development of trust. As the DMPM explained:

‘...trust and engagement are key to success, so we had to develop engaging campaigns that focus on adding value to our target audience in order to gain their trust and make them engaged with our brand’ (DMPM interview).

This represents a move away from the classic sales pitch, which is often associated with B2B events. Indeed, for some attendees of Cisco’s ESAs, the lack of an overt, product-led sales pitch came as a positive surprise. Thus, one Twitter user commented favourably on the focus of Cisco House being on what can be done with the product rather than on the product itself:

‘#Cisco leveraging Olympics gig with #CiscoHouse – good focus on what networks do, not just networks themselves – key positioning for them’ (j_caron, 2012).

Despite some Tweets suggesting that they would have liked to see more Cisco ‘hardware’ on show (asendent88, 2012) the overwhelming majority of feedback relating to Cisco House was positive, which leads us to suggest that the design of Cisco House, in its creation of a mutual space where the organisation could coalesce with its customers and wider stakeholders, facilitated both sponsor and attendee objectives.

4.4 Cisco Interview Series

The Cisco Interview Series comprised three online interviews with current and former British Olympians - athlete Darren Campbell, sailor Iain Percy and swimmer Liam Tancock - discussing:

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3 '...their journey to the Olympics... the link between technology and the sport...
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5 [how] to learn from their experiences of developing winning strategies in sport and
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7 how these can be transferred into a business context' (DMPM Interview).
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10 These interviews, facilitated by Cisco's WebEx online meeting and video conferencing
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12 software, were broadcast live, with opportunities for attendees to ask questions through
13
14 WebEx. As with the PFS webinars, the CIS interviews were also recorded and made available
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16 through YouTube, thus again broadening their potential reach.
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19 In contrast to the success of the PFS webinars and Cisco House, the MCL admitted
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21 that the Cisco Interview Series 'could not drive the audience sufficiently to make it cost-
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23 effective in any way' and, as a result, this ESA was stopped early. Part of the failure of the
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25 CIS was attributed to its inability to attract 'higher profile', world-class athletes due to
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27 budgetary constraints (MCL interview). However, a key difference between the CIS and the
28
29 other two Cisco ESAs appeared to lie in the value or relevance to the B2B client. Whilst the
30
31 PFS webinars and Cisco House delivered content and experiences that were both engaging to
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33 attendees and had direct B2B relevance, the CIS contained simply 'nice to know' information
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35 (e.g. athletes' training habits) rather than business-crucial content. Among the target audience
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37 of executives who are pressed for time (MCL interview), the CIS, which seemed more akin to
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39 the after-dinner speaker seen in conventional CH, clearly failed to deliver relevant and value-
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41 adding reasons for business attendance. Indeed, reflecting upon the failure of the CIS to
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43 contribute towards the meaningful achievement of Cisco's objectives, the MCL noted that it
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45 was like trying to 'fit a square peg into a round hole,' going on to explain that 'had we got the
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47 biggest, you know, Michael Phelps, Usain Bolt, etc., we might have done better, but equally
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49 we might have lost a shedload more money'. While the CIS may have been of interest to
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51 general sports fans, these were not Cisco's direct target audience (MCL interview). No
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amount of ‘Olympification’ of content appeared to compensate for this ESA’s absence of relevance to Cisco’s business stakeholders.

5.0 Discussion

5.1 RQ1: Using event design principles to deliver effective ESAs

It is clear from the above case discussion that Cisco drew on a number of key principles of event design in creating and delivering its successful ESAs. The Cisco case suggests that a starting point for effective ESA lies in considering the multiple stakeholder priorities of attendees (as both individuals and B2B clients) alongside the host’s (Cisco’s) strategic priorities, and then combining the importance of both of these perspectives in the process of ESA design. In fact, careful consideration of ESA design at all stages of its planning and execution appears crucial to success. Where this is lacking, even in part, then the utility and impact of ESA may be diminished. For example, by not embedding multiple stakeholder priorities and associated business relevance (Poulsson and Kale, 2004), or business-related intellectual stimulation (Zarantonello and Schmitt, 2013) for the target audience within the CIS content, Cisco failed to drive audience traffic for this particular ESA.

Much sponsorship activation literature continues to focus on the sponsor’s objectives and priorities in developing effective activations (O’Reilly and Horning, 2013). However, this case study further endorses the view of Papadimitriou and Apostolopoulou (2009) that sponsors who offer something of value to wider stakeholder groups, including customers, are more likely to be successful than those who focus solely on their own company’s benefits. Adopting this focus when considering the needs of ESA attendees appears to be the key reason why Cisco was able to report success in broadly achieving its sponsorship objectives with its London 2012 ESAs (Cisco Digital Best Practice Report; CiscoUKI, 2012g). It also explains the positive impact of these ESAs, especially Cisco House, upon attendees. In short,

whilst the objectives of the sponsor are imperative in designing ESAs, all other stakeholders, including attendees as individual ESA consumers and B2B clients, need to be considered in that event design process.

One particularly relevant design element which is central to the creation and delivery of effective ESAs is theming (Nelson, 2009; Pine and Gilmore, 1998), in this case defined as forging some link between event content and London 2012. The sponsorship context confers onto sponsors the advantage of association with desirable properties, facilitating the nurturing of connections between ESA attendees and sponsor brands which are both memorable and relevant (Pine and Gilmore, 2016, 1999; Poulsson and Kale, 2004). For example, in the PFS webinars, the Olympic theme facilitated focus on both sponsor and attendee objectives (specifically, the former wished to be associated with the Olympic Games, while the business challenges arising from London's hosting of the Games were of interest to the latter). However, as exemplified by the CIS, in a B2B context sponsors must balance the theming of the ESA with a strong focus on relevance to the business client; merely adding an Olympic (or other similar sporting) theme to a planned event does not appear sufficient to entice busy executives to devote time to attend it.

In contrast to the traditional view that company representatives in a B2B context appraise marketing communications activities for their business-related reasons with less emotional attachment than B2C consumers (Gilliland and Johnston, 1997), the motivation for attendees to frequent and take part in ESA in a B2B context is driven by their combined identity as both representatives of their employer and pleasure-seeking individuals. This duality of roles has implications for designing effective ESAs if sponsor brands are to attract enough of their target attendees. Where Cisco's ESAs (most notably Cisco House) were particularly successful was in crafting multi-dimensional experiences, combining Pine and Gilmore's (1998) elements of education (such as the PFS webinars or the Business

Transformation Experience at Cisco House which offered attendees deeper and more immersive opportunities for learning, knowledge exchange, networking, and time and space to think about how experiences gained can be embedded within their organisations) with more escapist (e.g. kinetic technology), aesthetic (e.g. the overall look and feel of Cisco House with the view across the Olympic Park) and entertaining elements (e.g. the interactive exhibits and, for some, tickets to Olympic events). Here, we see a departure from previous work on B2B events such as trade shows, where sensorial elements have been deemed less relevant (Rinallo *et al.*, 2010), and where there are suggestions that entertainment and education needs cannot be satisfied by the same event (Altschwager *et al.*, 2015). By recognising the dual motivations for attendance at B2B-focused events and adopting an intricate and multifaceted event design, B2B sponsors can create experiences which deliver on sensorial, affective, physical and cognitive levels (Schmitt, 1999). This can excite attendees from an individual entertainment perspective, as well as offering them more intellectually stimulating and justifiable business outcomes as representatives of their employer. The latter is particularly relevant in light of the shifting ethical compass of organisations in a post-recessionary climate, where businesses may increasingly need, or need to be seen, to conduct their affairs in a financially and socially responsible manner (Stern, 2012).

Thus, in answer to RQ1, the Cisco case has demonstrated that by drawing on not only the principles of event/experience design traditionally associated with B2B events in a trade show guise (i.e. a focus on the educational or cognitive dimensions), but also attending to the entertainment, escapist and aesthetic needs of attendees as individuals, sponsors can deliver successful ESAs. The Cisco ESAs which were successful in this were both virtual (PFS webinars) and physical (Cisco House), thus it would appear that it is not the nature of the event *per se* which facilitates this integration of functional and hedonistic value. Rather, it is

a focus on delivering business value to attendees in a setting or manner which they find personally enticing in some way, either through its ease of access (e.g. archived PFS webinars), opportunity to try something new (e.g. kinetic technology), or the sparking of a personal interest (e.g. the unique view across the Olympic Park). This represents a departure from CH, with its sole focus on hedonic entertainment. It also sets ESA apart from traditional B2B event design thinking, which, based on notions of a rational customer (Gilliland and Johnston, 1997), typically emphasises business relevance and positions sensorial stimulation as merely a means to the end goal of event attendees acquiring knowledge (Rinallo *et al*, 2010). The blending of business relevance with more entertainment-oriented sensorial event design features (Holbrook and Hirschmann, 1982) represents an advancement of our understanding of how sponsors should craft ESAs to achieve maximum value for both themselves and attendees.

5.2 RQ2: Overcoming challenges posed by increased clutter, the terms of sponsorship agreements and the unpredictable nature of sponsorship to deliver effective ESAs

The restrictions placed on sponsor activity associated with the specific rights granted to each sponsor present a challenge in the design and delivery of ESAs, as contrasted with non-sponsorship-linked experiential marketing activities. In the case of Cisco's ESAs, the organisation was able to overcome the restrictions on the promotion of its video conferencing software by showcasing the benefits and features of its TelePresence technology during the PFS webinars. The lack of overt presentation of Cisco products was also a feature of Cisco House, with the emphasis placed more on what Cisco makes possible (i.e. positioning the brand as a solutions provider). Thus, we see that well-crafted ESAs shift the managerial focus of sponsorship activation towards the facilitation of experiences, where the products become integral to the ESA delivery and hopefully sell themselves. Clearly, ESAs may work best for

sponsors that produce certain types of products and services. Although Cisco is not unique amongst B2B organisations, its products are technology solutions, and these lend themselves to the curation of innovative (Wood and Masterman, 2007) ESA activities that facilitate participant involvement and interactive showcasing around business-relevant experiential content. Creating an ESA similar to Cisco’s might be more challenging for other B2B organisations, particularly those whose product offerings are more tangible and/or potentially less involving. However, such a challenge need not be insurmountable, particularly where sponsors are able to work together creatively to deliver effective ESAs.

The PFS webinars provide a clear example of how the multi-sponsor network associated with a large sporting event such as the Olympic Games may actually deliver sponsors additional design opportunities for their ESAs by bringing them together with other sponsors to enhance the value provided to attendees. Rather than seeing the cluttered, multi-sponsor network as a challenge, the opportunity to collaboratively produce ESAs with a diverse range of organisations, which offer potentially complementary products, services or capabilities, opens up huge possibilities for brands to engage with audiences they may otherwise have struggled to reach. Sponsors can thus become facilitators, rather than mere providers. This means they can work together to deliver ESAs that adhere to sponsorship rights restrictions but which are also memorable (Pine and Gilmore, 2016, 1999), not only for their content, but also for their ability to stimulate attendees intellectually (Zarantonello and Schmitt, 2013) and thus deliver solutions to their particular needs (Crowther and Donlan, 2011; Kale et al., 2010; Wohlfeil and Whelan, 2007). As discussed above, the creative blending of these educational and entertaining design features also allows sponsors to navigate the accountability challenge posed by legal restrictions and ethical codes of conduct surrounding B2B hospitality.

The increasingly cluttered sponsorship environment presents a further challenge, which is the question of how to attract the desired attendees to ESAs. In this respect, the Cisco case showcases an innovative means of event promotion, such that an invitation to a particular ESA confers a sense of exclusivity and therefore is more likely to lead to attendance by the target market. This effective targeting of messages towards particular individuals (who, as seen above, sometimes were not even the directly sought attendees) helps defuse the conventional CH problem of sponsors attempting to out-lavish each other to secure stakeholder attendance at the same sporting event (Bennett, 2003; Luckhurst, 1996).

Echoing previous studies of sponsorship activation, which emphasise the importance of selecting an appropriate mix of activation tools (O'Reilly and Horning, 2013; Davies and Tsiantas, 2008), it is clear that ESA activities will be less effective and impactful, both for sponsors and the businesses represented through client attendees, if they do not make full use of the various other promotional media platforms available. This case also demonstrates the power of social media in maximising the impact of ESA, which in turn has implications for sponsorship activation and evaluation more generally (Meenaghan *et al.*, 2013). Properly integrated social media and other sponsorship-linked marketing communications can extend the impact of ESAs away from the immediate time and space boundaries of the sponsored sports event itself (Crowther, 2010), thereby helping avoid direct interaction with other potential sponsorship clutter around a given event.

Inherent in the nature of sponsorship is a sponsor's lack of control over the actions of the sponsored property (Meenaghan, 1991; Westberg *et al.*, 2008), and the potential negative image transfer associated with scandals, athlete transgressions or other negative publicity associated with the sponsored event (Hughes and Shank, 2005). In contrast, a much lauded strength of event marketing is that it allows marketers full control over the way in which their brands are presented (Whelan and Wohlfeil, 2006). In the case of London 2012, the

prevailing sentiment during the Games was positive (Clark and Gibson, 2012), presenting few real issues to sponsors such as Cisco. However, the unique nature of each sponsored event means that this may not always be the case. Staging custom-built ESAs places the sponsor brands at the heart of the attendee experience (Cliffe and Motion, 2005), allowing them to more fully shape the outcomes and retain some modicum of control over at least that part of an attendee’s interaction with their brand within the sponsored event context (Donlan and Crowther, 2014).

In summary, the Cisco case suggests that sponsors may face a series of challenges arising from the unpredictable nature of sponsorship itself, the restrictions imposed by sponsorship agreements and increasing sponsorship clutter. In answer to RQ2, the integration of sponsor products and services into ESA design and delivery, along with creativity and innovation in the marketing of ESAs as part of a wider integrated sponsorship activation campaign, and also the adoption of multi-sponsor collaboration, all appear crucial in allowing sponsors to navigate these challenges.

6.0 Conclusion and Implications

Consistent with wider growth in event and experiential marketing, the staging of spin-off events, or ESA, is increasingly a means for brands to activate their sports sponsorships to maximum effect. This paper has provided a detailed examination of the implementation of ESA by a B2B brand, thus contributing to the wider body of knowledge on sponsorship activation and extending understanding of this within a B2B context. In particular, we argue that ESA represents a departure from conventional thinking in B2B event design, which typically advocates a much stricter demarcation between the educational and entertainment dimensions. Our findings suggest that when developing ESAs, it is important that sponsors do not draw solely on the event design principles associated with B2B events such as trade

shows, which might usually include a focus on business relevance and education. Instead, in order to meet needs of attendees as individuals and business representatives, sponsors might helpfully blend these business-focused event objectives with more hedonic and sensorial event design features, more commonly seen in areas such as B2C event design and traditional CH for B2B clients. This blurring of the boundaries between the design principles traditionally associated with both B2B and B2C events represents a refining of our understanding of how sponsors can craft effective ESAs which are relevant for the 21st Century sponsorship environment. From a practitioner perspective, the implication is that sponsors may need to reappraise event designs aimed at B2B clients, blending cognitive and more sensorial and hedonic elements.

Unlike non-sponsorship-linked B2B events, in developing ESAs, sports sponsors face a number of challenges arising from the nature of sponsorship, growing sponsorship clutter, and restrictions imposed by rights holders such as the IOC and FIFA. In practical terms, the Cisco case demonstrates that joint working between diverse sponsors and other stakeholders in ESA design and delivery represents a fruitful solution to the challenge of balancing sponsorship restrictions around product categories with a sponsor's marketing objectives, particularly in a multi-sponsor context. From a theoretical perspective, this suggests that understandings of the scope of collaboration between sponsors and other stakeholders (see, for example, Farrelly and Quester, 2005) can be extended to incorporate inter-sponsor collaboration in the design and delivery of ESAs. A notable challenge in these increasingly cluttered multi-sponsor contexts is simply getting the 'right' people to attend an ESA. To this end, the Cisco case indicates that ESA attendance can be boosted by creating a buzz around an event through its promotion on social media to target attendees, as well as to those individuals who are not directly sought by the sponsor, but who, through their word-of-mouth creation, may encourage attendance of the targets in question.

This paper has explored how the principles of experiential marketing and event design can be incorporated into ESA by a B2B brand in a sports mega-event context. In light of the limitation acknowledged above relating to the use of Cisco-produced sources, future research could look to draw on the perspective(s) of multiple stakeholders, namely: brand sponsorship managers, event managers, attendees, and rights holders. This could allow for comparison and an effectiveness appraisal of the various ESA approaches of different sponsoring brands in different sponsorship contexts. Additionally, future research could examine the use of ESA by a wider range of B2B sponsors, especially in product/service sectors which do not have some of the technology showcasing advantages of brands such as Cisco. Finally, as ESA practice continues to evolve, future studies may choose a longitudinal perspective to more fully understand the use of ESA as a tool in the contemporary sports sponsor’s activational armoury.

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